

A CAPTAIN UNAFRAID

DYNAMITE JOHNNY O'BRIEN, CUBA'S AMERICAN HERO

THE FIGHTING RACE

"Read out the names!" and Burke sat back,
And Kelly dropped his head;
While Shea—they call him Scholar Jack—
Went down the list of the dead,—
Officers, seamen, gunners, marines,
The crews of the gig and yawl,
The bearded man and the lad in his teens,
Carpenters, coal passers—all.
Then, knocking the ashes from out his pipe,
Said Burke in an offhand way,
"We're all in that dead man's list, by Cripes!
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well, here's to the Maine, and I'm sorry for Spain,"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

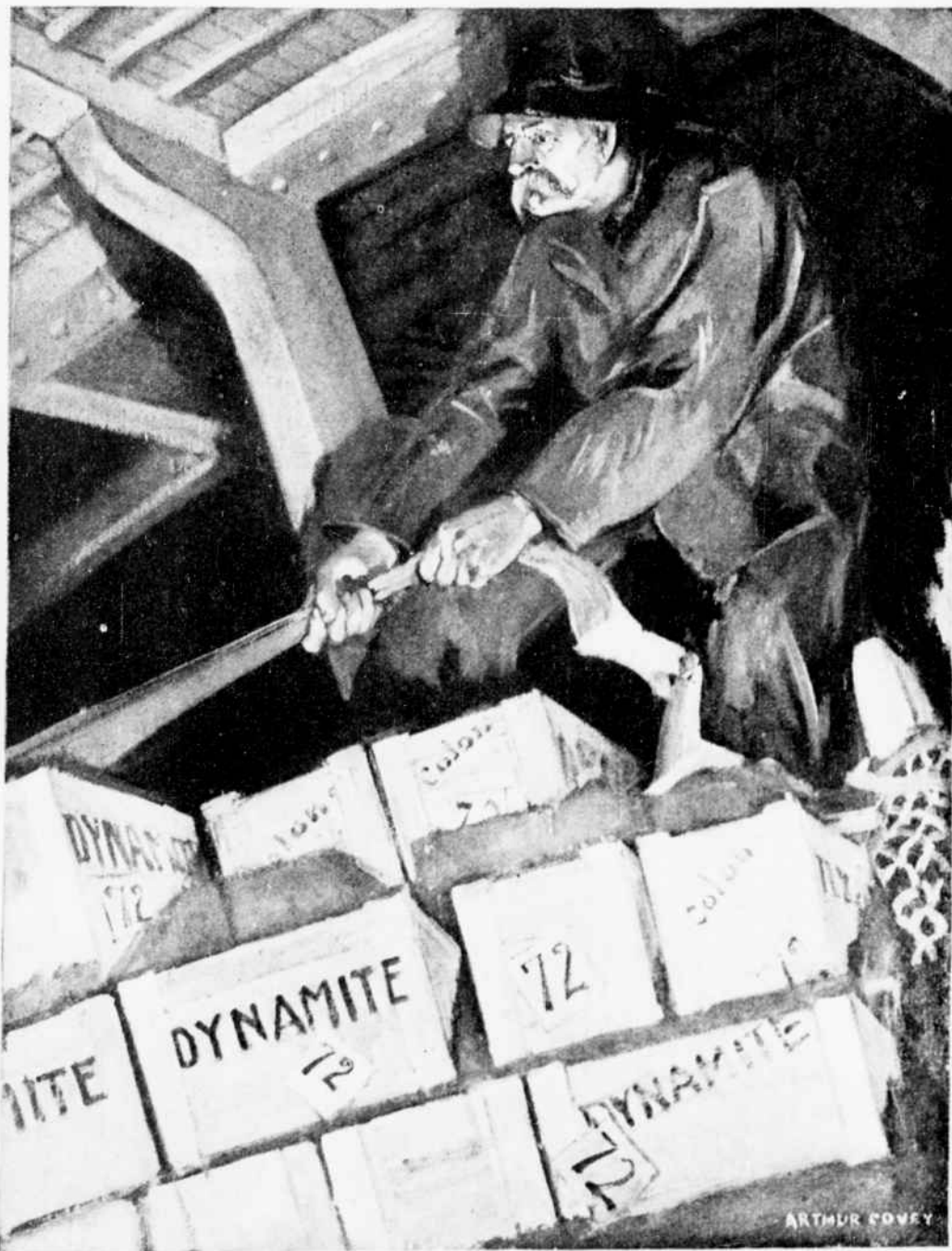
—J. I. C. Clarke

EDITORIAL NOTE.—Where there's a Kelly, a Burke, or a Shea, one is sure to find an O'Brien. Here he is: the Hell Gate pilot whose faithfulness and daring made Cuba Libre. For more than a dozen years this modest hero has kept his secrets. Recently Horace Smith, author of "The War Maker," succeeded in convincing Captain O'Brien that his wonderful achievements ought to be embalmed in type. This chapter is the first of a short series of adventure stories telling for the first time how the Cuban insurrection was kept alive until the Spanish-American War put an end to Spanish colonial misrule. We shall print only the most thrilling episodes, just as they were related to Mr. Smith by Dynamite Johnny himself.

WITH my unbridled passion for the sea and the accompanying love of adventure it engendered it was inevitable that I should drift into filibustering. Lest any false ideas be created by this confession, it should also be stated that I have never knowingly violated any law except the one against filibustering, and that I regard as an immoral instrument, for the reason that it seeks to destroy the spirit of liberty. If the United States law against filibustering had been effectively enforced (and let it be recorded here, before the unfolding of secrets begins, that its avoidance was accomplished through no shadow of connivance at Washington: for every instrument at the hand of this Government was exerted to the utmost to prevent its infraction and maintain an attitude of strict neutrality), Cuba might still be the victim of Spain's murderous misrule, the acquisition of our entering wedge into the West Indies (Porto Rico) would have been postponed for years, and the Filipinos might still be fighting with one another and the Spaniards.

Laws against filibustering are eminently fitting in monarchical lands. No Emperor, whether ruling by divine right or by right of might, wants to see another Emperor dethroned, and perhaps compelled to work for a living along with the unanointed, for fear of the effect the proceeding may have on his own subjects; but such antiquated theories of government by suppression have no place in a Republic. Filibustering, which often is misunderstood, is simply the art of surreptitiously conveying munitions of war to a people, or a part of a people, who are in rebellion against a Government whose overthrow, generally speaking, is sought because it is inefficient or corrupt or both. Ordinarily the means of warfare are held by the ruling Power; so it is necessary for the insurgents to secure their arms from the outside. It is my doctrine that this is an altogether laudable ambition, and that they should be allowed to buy all they can pay for, with no interference save from those with whom they are at war. Certainly, I think, it does not come with good grace from a country that prides itself on the principle that the will of the people is the law of the land, to say to its neighbors that they shall not oppose tyranny and fight with every means in their power for what they believe to be their rights. We should not forget that we were rebels once ourselves and warmly welcomed filibustering aid from France. The law that forbids the departure of filibustering expeditions from the territory of neutral Powers is simply an act of comity between nations, and is based on no moral principle. It really amounts to one of the entangling alliances that Washington warned this country to avoid.

In the persistent and enthusiastic violation of this obnoxious law I worked much harder and for much less money than I could have easily earned by adhering to the life of a pilot,—free from danger, but also free from excitement,—whereas I could have made a fortune by running counter to other laws, but refused to do it. It was the spirit of the thing that appealed to me. I felt that I was, to the full length of my ability and in the way to which I was best suited, helping mankind by aiding the cause of liberty, and at the same time satisfying my adventurous ambition. I tried to fight for my own country, and when that failed I fought for other countries. In the course of this long warfare I was several times arrested for filibustering, but never convicted; so, under our laws, which presume every man to be innocent until he is proved guilty, it must be considered



That Was as Ticklish a Position as I Have Ever Been In.

that I am entirely innocent of the high crimes and misdemeanors to which I here confess for the first time. Until now I never have told a word of what I have done or how I did it.

I WAS born in the old "Drydock" section of New York, almost on the bank of the East River, on April 20, 1837. My parents came from County Longford, Ireland, where they were neighbors of and related to the parents of General Phil Sheridan. The O'Brien and Sheridan families, so my mother told me, came to this country on the same ship, not long before I was born, and my father turned from farmer to machinist. George Steers' shipyard, at which the famous yacht America and all of the Sandy Hook pilotboats were built, was only a block from my home, and other yards celebrated in those days—Webb's, Brown's, Collier's, Mackey's, Westervelt's, Roosevelt & Joyce's, and English's—were clustered close about. Nearby were the Morgan and Novelty ironworks, where boilers were built. But there were few steamships in those days,—sailors were sailors then, and machinists stayed ashore.

My childhood's playground was the neighboring shipyards, and later on after school hours I worked in them, faithfully but without charge, spinning oakum, tending pitchpot, or wedging treenails. At the time I considered that I assisted greatly in fitting out the Mechanics' Own, a schooner bought by a lot of mechanics who sailed her round to California in 1849. My brother Peter, seven years my senior, operated a ferry, which consisted of a large rowboat equipped with a sail, across to Greenpoint, and often took me with him. In this way I learned how to handle a boat, and also picked up much

useful knowledge concerning Hell Gate, the well named tricky and tortuous channel that connects Long Island Sound with the East River.

The sea lust came over me so rapidly and so strongly that, without attempting to resist it, I ran away from home and school when I was thirteen years old, and signed on as cook in the fishing sloop Albion under Luke Russell, a smart sailor who afterward commanded Commodore Bennett's first yacht Rebecca and won the historic race round Long Island by taking a short cut through Plum Gut, which was not barred because it was not thought anyone would attempt it. I stayed with him all of one winter, before Brother Peter discovered me and took me back home.

THAT one taste of the mighty deep intoxicated me. There was nothing for me thereafter but the open sea, and my parents finally concluded to let me have my way about it. For several years I devoted myself to fishing, sailing yachts for owners who knew nothing about handling them, and serving as apprentice on the old pilotboat Jane. Being constitutionally disposed to give orders rather than to obey them, I took a course in navigation at the Thom school on Cherry-st. to fit myself for command rank.

When the Civil War began I was sailing a sloop for Edward N. Dickinson, of Far Rockaway, a famous patent lawyer. With his help I tried to secure an appointment in the navy; but failed, as I was deemed too young. I was too well acquainted with myself to enlist as an able seaman, which I was tempted to do. I knew that when some smart young officer undertook to tell me something about which I was better qualified to